

Team Building: Key Ingredients Determine Success

Factors Crucial to Team Success

Gaining the competitive edge in today's global market requires building a team where the strengths of each team member are focused in a collaborative effort to succeed. How a team works as a whole – its power as the sum of its parts – is what ultimately determines success, no matter how capable and impressive its individual contributors are.

Managers or recruiters tasked with putting together teams inside a business often focus almost exclusively on the technical skill sets they are seeking. However, without adequate knowledge of the potential team members' communications skills and abilities to work inside the confines of a focused unit – it's nearly impossible to select a group of individuals who can work together effectively as a group.

The rewards for creating such focused and effective teams are great. A well-designed and coordinated team that communicates and collaborates efficiently, typically achieves much better results than skilled individuals working alone or in parallel.

Ten Focus Areas for Building a Successful Team

Survey respondents were asked about the factors that most affect the teams they work with. They were then asked to rate how often, and to what extent, these factors influenced their teams. Respondents' answers were based on a one to five scale, with one being the least important and five being the most important. Communication within a team is considered the most significant factor in a team's success. The other highly-rated team effectiveness factors also all ultimately impact communication in some way.

In order of importance, the top ten focus areas for building a successful team:



- ▲ Communication
- ▲ Trust among team members
- ▲ Cooperation among team members
- ▲ Interpersonal conflicts within the team
- ▲ Adaptation of the team to a changing environment
- ▲ Role clarity within the team
- ▲ Feedback from supervisor to the team
- ▲ Stress experienced by team members
- ▲ Problem solving success of the team
- ▲ Interdependence of team task and/or goals

The challenge for many teams may not be a lack of communication, but a lack of effective communication. The method by which information is conveyed is just as important as the message itself. Individuals perceive communication and messages differently. In order to communicate effectively, teams must learn how to accurately convey information among other team members to ensure the message is received in the way it is intended. Otherwise it will be misinterpreted until the erroneous things become important, while time and talent are wasted.

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Additionally, the fact that communication is the biggest problem affecting teams can be viewed as evidence of “hidden expertise” within teams.

“Hidden Expertise” Among Team Members Impacts Effective Communication

“Hidden expertise” inside a team refers to information that needs to be exchanged among team members, but which a person inside the team either is reluctant to share or thinks is universally known. Therefore, instead of conveying this uniquely personal information, the team member remains silent.

In the workplace, this is commonly discovered when someone says: “I thought you knew.” In knowledge-process literature, this is sometimes known as “assumed” knowledge or “tacit” knowledge. When essential bits of information are not explicitly exchanged among team members, the decision-making quality of the team is degraded. Determining “who knows what” inside a team can sometimes be as difficult as generating the important information in the first place, and just as vital.

The Lowest Ranked Factors for Building Successful Teams

- ▲ Participation of team members in team activities
- ▲ Confidence of team members to attain desired results
- ▲ Self-discipline of team members
- ▲ Learning orientation of team members
- ▲ Conscientiousness of team members
- ▲ Emotional stability of team members
- ▲ Extraversion of team members

One would think that some of these lower-ranked factors, such as participation of team members, would have a much higher impact on a team’s success.

Perhaps some of these factors are typically considered merely facets of the higher-ranked factors, such as cooperation. Another explanation is that the lower-ranked items seem more “personal” than “interpersonal,” and are therefore less important for the cohesive power of the team itself.

The Group Versus an Individual

When it comes to studying groups, the biggest debate has always been whether a group will outperform the quality of the best person in the group when it comes to decision quality.

The research here indicates that in order for a group’s work to surpass the quality of the best person, each member’s information must be shared, aggregated, and re-distributed appropriately. This information sharing protocol must also be efficient and effective, and decisions must be operationalized and executed accurately, with an attention to detail.

For teams to be successful, they must address and master communication. In order to do this, teams must determine each member’s communication style, and how it relates to the communication style of the other members.

From accurate knowledge come powerful results. To

create the best teams, a manager must know as much about the communication styles of the team members as possible. Only then can a system of communication be established. Everything else is secondary: there is no bigger challenge than the problem that no one knows about.

Members who are interested in obtaining information pertaining to “Team Building” or the identification of staff communication styles are encouraged to contact the TPM office.

